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Supporting Arab States in the periodic review of progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years after their adoption

Summary

As part of national and regional preparations to review progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 25 years after their adoption at the Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/8 calls upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and encourages the regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level can feed into the 2020 review.

Pursuant to that resolution, and in line with previous reviews, ESCWA is collaborating with the Arab States/North Africa Regional Office of the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the League of Arab States to unify efforts aimed at supporting Arab States in preparing their national reviews, and at completing a regional review that includes all Arab countries. A comprehensive and integrated participatory work programme has been developed to keep pace with the periodic reviews of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region. Member States are invited to take note of the review process on the national and regional levels, and to provide support to national women's machineries in preparing national reviews.

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Introduction

1. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action were adopted at the Fourth Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. The General Assembly reaffirmed its commitment to them at its twenty-third special session held in 2000. The Beijing Platform for Action is a global framework for achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. It calls on Governments, the international community, civil society and the private sector to take strategic action in the following 12 critical areas of concern: poverty; education and training; health care; violence; armed conflict; the economy; power sharing and decision-making; institutional mechanisms to promote women's advancement; human rights; the media; the environment; and the rights of the girl child.

2. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) reviews progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action every five years. Four reviews have been conducted to date in 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2015. The participatory review process concludes with a final report that affirms global commitment to empowering women and girls, and identifies work priorities for the next five years. The United Nations is currently preparing for the 25-year review (Beijing+25). It is organizing an event to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in September 2020, and a high-level meeting of the General Assembly aimed at expediting efforts towards achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. The international community will also come together at the sixty-fourth session of the Commission on the Status of Women, to be held in March 2020, to review progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the main obstacles faced by countries in that regard.

3. As part of national and regional preparations for Beijing+25, Economic and Social Council resolution 2018/8 calls upon all States to undertake comprehensive national-level reviews of the progress made and challenges encountered in the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the outcomes of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, and encourages the regional commissions to undertake regional reviews so that the outcomes of intergovernmental processes at the regional level can feed into the 2020 review. The provisions of this resolution are consistent with those of previous United Nations resolutions on the issue.

I. ROLE OF ESCWA IN SUPPORTING ARAB STATES

4. The secretariat of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in its capacity as the regional coordination centre for the Fourth Conference on Women, has undertaken an active role in supporting Arab States in preparing their national reviews and in presenting regional reviews. As such, ESCWA, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, has continually followed up on progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

5. In 1995, the ESCWA secretariat worked with Arab States, in collaboration with the League of Arab States, to adopt the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women to the Year 2005. In 1996, the ESCWA secretariat, in coordination with the League of Arab States, held the Arab Conference for the Development of a Programme of Work and a Follow-up Mechanism Beyond the Beijing Conference. In 1998, the second Arab Meeting to Follow-up the Beijing Conference was convened in Beirut, in preparation for the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly (Beijing+5). ESCWA prepared a regional report to assess progress since the Fourth Conference on Women, which it presented to the General Assembly at its twenty-third special session.

6. In 2003, ESCWA organized the first preparatory meeting for Beijing+10 to monitor progress in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the Arab Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women by reviewing, assessing and evaluating achievements and identifying obstacles impeding the accomplishment of the goals set in 1995. In the light of proposals from Arab States, ESCWA

prepared a document setting out new procedures and initiatives to overcome obstacles hampering the advancement of Arab women.

7. In 2004, ESCWA held the Arab Regional Conference Ten Years After Beijing: Call for Peace, which resulted in the Beirut Declaration on Arab Women Ten Years after Beijing: A Call for Peace following its adoption by the Committee on Women at its second session that was held as part of the Conference. The Beirut Declaration was to be implemented during the following 10 years until 2015 as part of the implementation process of the Beijing Platform for Action, with a view to empowering women, improving their situation and increasing their participation in political, economic and social life.

8. ESCWA continued its pioneering role in supporting national and regional preparations for Beijing+15. In collaboration and coordination with the League of Arab States, ESCWA prepared a draft consolidated Arab report on Beijing+15, which was presented to the Committee on Women at its fourth meeting.

9. In 2014, ESCWA prepared an integrated work programme for Beijing+20, which it implemented in collaboration and coordination with UN-Women and the League of Arab States. It also drafted a consolidated Arab report on Beijing+20, which was adopted at the Arab High-level Conference on Progress Achieved in the Implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action after 20 Years along with the Arab Declaration Towards Justice and Equality for Women in the Arab Region. The outcomes of the Beijing reviews have provided Arab States with a clear road map to move towards achieving gender equality by 2030.

10. ESCWA is adopting the same participatory approach for Beijing+25. UN-Women and the five United Nations regional commissions have prepared a guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews, aimed at supporting States and other stakeholders in conducting their reviews.[1] In line with previous reviews, ESCWA is collaborating with the Arab States/North Africa Regional Office of UN-Women and the League of Arab States to unify efforts aimed at supporting Arab States in preparing their national reviews, and at completing a regional review that includes all Arab countries.

II. PROPOSED ACTIVITIES FOR BEIJING+25 IN THE ARAB REGION

11. In line with previous reviews, ESCWA has prepared a comprehensive and integrated participatory work programme, to be implemented in collaboration with UN-Women and the League of Arab States. The programme aims to support Arab States in conducting their national reviews and preparing for Beijing+25. Work began with an official statement that was sent to all Arab States in September 2018, aimed at introducing the work programme and requesting the appointment of an official focal point to follow up on the implementation of the various activities and phases of the review process in the Arab region.

12. The work programme includes the following activities, regional events and technical support to assist States in preparing their national reviews, as required.

A. WORKSHOP FOR REPRESENTATIVES OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S MACHINERIES TO DISCUSS AND PROVIDE GUIDANCE ON PREPARING COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL REVIEWS

13. A regional workshop will be held in Beirut in January 2019 aimed at providing support in preparing Beijing+25 national reviews, by presenting and discussing the structure and contents of national reviews in the light of the guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews. The workshop will include a presentation and discussion of the various proposed sections of the reviews and their annexes, and their links to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 on gender equality and women's empowerment.

[1] UN-Women, Guidance note for comprehensive national-level reviews, September 2018. Available at http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/64/national-reviews/csw64-guidance-note-for-comprehensive-national-level%20reviews-en.pdf?la=en&vs=1454.

14. Participants will include representatives of member States involved in preparing national reviews. The workshop will provide an opportunity to exchange expertise on preparing national reviews, and to review key achievements by Arab States in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the obstacles they face in that regard, and future work priorities in view of regional developments and challenges, on the one hand, and regional specificities, on the other.

15. Following the workshop, member States will be requested to begin preparing their reviews and submit them by May 2019. ESCWA will draft a consolidated Arab report on Beijing+25.

B. Workshop with civil society to discuss progress in women's advancement under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

16. A workshop will be held in Beirut in April 2019 to highlight the key role of civil society in women's advancement and in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Participants will include representatives of international, regional and national civil society organizations and of Arab Governments so as to achieve national priorities.

17. The workshop also aims to identify and discuss the main obstacles and challenges facing the Arab region in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and their impact on civil society's role in achieving desired progress. The workshop is expected to clarify civil society's position on women's issues in the region, and to result in recommendations that contribute to accelerating the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

C. Expert group meeting to review the consolidated Arab report on Beijing+25

18. An expert group meeting will be held in Beirut in September 2019, concurrently with the nineteenth session of the ESCWA Committee on Women. Participants will include representatives of all stakeholders and national women's machineries. The meeting aims to present and discuss the first draft of the consolidated Arab report, which monitors progress in Arab countries in the 12 critical areas of concern for Beijing+25.

19. The meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss developments in women's issues in view of the critical situations in most Arab countries. It will also review achievements, identify major obstacles and challenges that Arab countries are striving to overcome, highlight emerging priorities, and submit recommendations to continue joint efforts in the coming five years to support women's issues and expedite the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action in the Arab region. The report will be amended according to the discussions and interventions at the meeting. The final version will then be presented for adoption at a high-level conference, to be held in February 2020.

D. High-level conference to discuss the consolidated Arab report on Beijing+25 in the Arab region

20. The work programme on Beijing+25 in the Arab region will culminate in a high-level conference, to be held in February 2020. Participants will include representatives of official bodies and national women's machineries in Arab countries, as well as experts and representatives of United Nations regional organizations and civil society.

21. The conference aims to reaffirm commitments to achieving gender equality, and to empowering women and girls in the Arab region and upholding their rights under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The conference will review national achievements and challenges in implementing the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, and identify ways to achieve their objectives in an integrated manner in the future. It will also consider parallel international processes and current transformations in the region, and their impact on the Beijing process. The conference will conclude with the adoption of the consolidated Arab report on

Beijing+25, and an outcome document that reaffirms the Beijing principles and identifies the working priorities in view of current regional transformations.

22. The importance of the conference lies in its expected outcomes that will form the basis of the official Arab position on Beijing+25, which will be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its sixty-fourth session to be held in New York in March 2020, thus constituting the Arab side of Beijing+25.

23. Member States are invited to take note of the national and regional review processes, and to provide support to national women's machineries in preparing national reviews.